



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Trade and Industry

***Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers’
Association Leadership Discussion and
Networking Event
“Promise and Opportunity for a
Brighter Future”***

FEATURE ADDRESS

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE-SCOON
MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY**

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Good morning,

I am very pleased to address you today at TTMA's Leadership Discussion Forum 2024.

I must commend Mr. Roger Roach on his re-election as President and for his continued and sterling contribution to advancing the goals of the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association. The Ministry of Trade and Industry looks forward to facilitating the momentum in growing and expanding the Manufacturing Sector.

Let me take the opportunity to commend TTMA for continuing to host these leadership forums each year, as it provides a platform for the exchange of ideas and insights in a collaborative environment that can spark innovation and creativity, leading to the development of novel, internationally accepted solutions.

What is more, is the relevance of this year's theme "Promise and Opportunity for a Brighter Future" which not only pushes a culture of identifying opportunities for continuous improvement but promotes adaptation to the changing environment and positioning of our businesses for long term success.

The IMF in its latest review in March 2024, stated, that Trinidad and Tobago's economic growth is projected to gain momentum. "Real GDP (gross domestic product) is expected to expand by 2.4 per cent in 2024, supported by the non-energy sector and new energy products coming on stream."

This was further supported by the Central Bank in its January 2024 Economic Bulletin which indicated that economic activity is expected to improve in 2024, bolstered by continued buoyancy in the non-energy sector. More specifically the report goes on to state that the non-energy sector is expected to benefit from continued strength in business activity, alongside robust consumer demand.

According to the latest data from the Central Statistical Office (CSO). There has been growth in a number of non-energy subsectors over the period January – August 2023 vs. January – August 2022, which the TTMA would be involved in and have an active interest in:

- Food and Beverage – increased by 5%;
- Paper and Paper related products – increased 8%;
- Tobacco manufacturing – increased 7%;
- Clothing, Textiles and Apparel increased by 24%;

- Pharmaceuticals increased by 9%; and

- Furniture & Lighting Fittings increased by 5%

This sets the foundation and puts us on a trajectory for a much brighter future.

Accessing Extra Regional Markets

Given the very narrow parameters in terms of population size within the country and even in the region, the only way to achieve continued growth is to export to extra regional markets. We are

laying the foundation for this through all the trade missions being conducted with the most recent being the Ghana Mission. I must congratulate the TTMA on a well-executed mission which saw over two dozen businesses and approximately 50 persons looking for opportunities in Ghana. This is just one of the nineteen (19) missions conducted over the period October 2022 to March 2024. All told, more than 200 B2B meetings were held and significant in-market visits and factory tours.

As you know, our Commercial Officers and Attaches have been strategically placed to ensure that you benefit from the opportunities to expand your reach to South America, the wider Caribbean region, the United States and the United Kingdom.

I am very pleased to report that our Commercial Officer located in Panama with responsibility for South America recently participated in the 8th Edition of Commercial Links of the Chamber of Foreign Trade of Costa Rica.

The Office identified suitable buyers for Trinidad and Tobago's products, generated both export and investment leads, submitted referrals to Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturing Companies for one on one B2B meetings; developed a database of key contacts; and arranged with key agencies in Costa Rica specific webinars to be held later this year to facilitate exporters understanding of specific requirements. These Commercial Offices are not only identifying opportunities but making the relevant connections to ensure that these opportunities materialize.

Developing Backward Linkages Toward Resilient Supply Chains

Backward linkages and a resilient supply chain are also crucial components for fostering a brighter future. A recent Study, facilitated by the MTI, revealed significant opportunities for backward and forward linkages between manufacturing and agricultural in specific subsectors such as poultry, fish processing, chemicals and food and beverage.

The study spoke to the opportunities for new product lines in fish processing, development of commercial farms to produce crops popularly used in many processed food and beverage products, and manufacturing of organic fertilizers and sustainable packaging material. Key opportunities were also identified in linking the manufacturing sector to the creative and tourism sectors. One example is the certification or recognition of key hotels as providing an authentic local experience for tourists, which in turn can create the opportunity for manufacturers to supply the relevant inputs into menu (food and beverage), spa products and other consumables, enhancing the experience.

I challenge the Membership of the TTMA to develop and further strengthen your backward linkages with your suppliers as well as explore near shoring opportunities (i.e. investing in the

production of raw materials either locally or in the region) as a viable option. By working closely with suppliers regionally, manufacturers can identify new opportunities for product improvement and develop innovative solutions to address evolving market demands.

Investigate Global Demand and Trade Complementarity

By maintaining an awareness of global market trends and shifts in consumer preferences, manufacturers can position themselves strategically to seize market opportunities. Critically examining our trade complementarity with other countries will allow us to leverage our comparative advantage to connect with global value chains. Through our Trade and Business Information Portal, manufacturers must continue to utilize the market access analysis tool to identify the opportunities that exist.

A simple search for cereals, for example, utilizing the International Trade Centre (ITC) Export Potential Map reveals that the markets with greatest potential for exports of cereals are Guyana, USA and Jamaica.

Outside of the Food and Beverage sector, we see an increase in international demand for industrial products, chemical products, construction products, pharmaceuticals and green products.

Opportunities in Sustainable Manufacturing

There is a growing global demand for sustainable products driven by increasing environmental awareness among consumers and international regulatory pressures. Manufacturers must shift to focus on greening of processes, eco- friendly products and packaging as this is no longer viewed as an ethical choice but rather a strategic imperative in reducing our carbon footprint.

The Government through key policies such as the National Development Strategy 2016-2030 - Placing the Environment at the Centre of Social and Economic Development, as well as the National Climate Change Policy and the Strategy for the reduction in Carbon Emissions in Trinidad and Tobago 2040, is ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago meets its international

obligations. We have gone a step further by providing financial and technical support to assist businesses in greening their processes via the Green Manufacturing Initiative (GMI) which will be implemented this year.

Digital Transformation

If we are to truly take advantage of opportunities and secure a brighter future, Manufacturers must embrace Digital transformation, this goes beyond the adoption of new technologies towards having a digital-first mind set and really leveraging the digital tools for efficiency and connectivity.

In addition to the significant work conducted by the Ministry of Digital Transformation, the Ministry of Trade and Industry in December 2023 signed an Agreement with UNCTAD for the development of a National E-Commerce Strategy. Just last week we had our first stakeholder consultation which was well attended by the private sector and key players where discussions focused on E-Payment Solutions, legislation, cyber

security, ICT Infrastructure, Digital Skills and Supporting E Commerce with Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation. We are expected to have this Strategy completed before the end of this year. E-commerce has revolutionized the way businesses reach customers, offering unprecedented opportunities to expand rapidly into new markets.

Investment

To allow manufacturers to expand their production capacity to accommodate growing demand, Government has invested into industrial parks as one part of an intentional strategy to drive further investments. Today I am pleased that since the launch of the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate, there is a total of 20 investors of which 14 are local direct investments, with projects at various stages of advancement. These investments include operations spanning several non-energy sectors, namely manufacturing, logistics and distribution, and fish processing. We will open Factory Road by the end of fiscal 2024 and preparation for Dow Village is well on its way.

As we seek to stimulate further domestic and foreign investment, the Special Economic Zones Act 2022 and Regulations, which is close to implementation (by June 01, 2024), will also enhance our investment environment creating significant opportunities for Manufacturers, local and foreign.

Conclusion

As I close, I would like to once again thank the TTMA for the opportunity to share these thoughts as we discuss “Opportunities for a Brighter Future”. Government policies, objectives and initiatives are clearly aligned to increasing exports to extra- regional markets, understanding global demand, promoting sustainability and digital transformation and driving investments. The Ministry of Trade and Industry applauds the ingenuity and tenacity of the manufacturing sector and encourage you to embrace opportunities that exist to secure a brighter future.

I thank you.